



Iran Shows Its Cards

http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/20080714_iran_shows_its_cards/

Posted on Jul 14, 2008

By Scott Ritter

There can no longer be any doubt about the consequences of any U.S. and/or Israeli military action against Iran. Armchair warriors, pundits and blustering politicians alike have been advocating a pre-emptive military strike against Iran for the purpose of neutralizing its nuclear-related infrastructure, as well as retarding Iran's ability to train and equip "terrorist" forces on Iranian soil before dispatching them to Iraq or parts unknown. Some, including me, have warned of the folly of such action, and now Iran itself has demonstrated why an attack would be insane

I've always pointed out that no plan survives initial contact with the enemy, and furthermore one can never forget that, in war, the enemy gets to vote. On the issue of an American and/or Israeli attack on Iran, the Iranian military has demonstrated exactly how it would cast its vote. [Iran recently fired off \(http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/sns-ap-iran-missiles,0,3816494.story?track=rss\)](http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/sns-ap-iran-missiles,0,3816494.story?track=rss) medium- and long-range missiles and rockets, in a clear demonstration of capability and intent. Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, regional oil production capability and U.S. military concentrations, along with Israeli cities, would all be subjected to an Iranian military response if Iran was attacked.

The Bush administration has shrugged off the Iranian military display as yet another example of how irresponsible the government in Tehran is. But the Pentagon for one has had to sit up and pay attention. For some time now, the admirals commanding the U.S. 5th Fleet in the Persian Gulf have maintained that they have the ability to keep the Strait of Hormuz open. But the fact is, the only way the United States could guarantee that the strait remained open would be to launch a massive pre-emptive military strike that swept the Iranian coast clear of the deadly Chinese-made surface-to-surface missiles that Iran would use to sink cargo ships in the strategic lane. This strike would involve hundreds of tactical aircraft backed up by limited ground action by Marines and U.S. Special Operations forces which would involve "boots on the ground" for several days, if not weeks. Such a strike is not envisioned in any "limited" military action being planned by the United States. But now that it is clear what the Iranian response would entail, there can no longer be any talk of a "limited" military attack on Iran.

The moment the United States makes a move to secure the Strait of Hormuz, Iran will unleash a massive bombardment of the military and industrial facilities of the United States and its allies, including the oil fields in Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. American military bases in Iraq and Kuwait, large—fixed and well known— would be smothered by rockets and missiles carrying deadly cluster bombs. The damage done would run into the hundreds of millions, if not into billions, of dollars, and hundreds, if not thousands, of U.S. military personnel would be killed and wounded.

To prevent or retard any Iranian missile attack, the United States would have to commit hundreds of combat sorties, combined with Special Operations forces, to a counter-missile fight which would need to span the considerable depth of the Persian landmass from which missiles might reach potential targets. While there has been some improvement in the U.S. military's counter-missile capability, one must never forget that in 1991 not a single Iraqi Scud missile was successfully interdicted by any aspect of American military action (airstrike, ground action or antiballistic missile), and in 2003 the U.S. military had mixed results against the far less capable Al-Samoud missiles. Israel was unable to prevent Hezbollah from firing large salvos of rockets into northern Israel during the summer 2006 conflict. There is no reason for optimism that the U.S. and Israel have suddenly found the solution to the Iranian missile threat.

There is virtually no chance the U.S. Navy would be able to prevent Iran from interfering with shipping through the strait. There is every chance the Navy would take significant casualties, in both ships lost and personnel killed or wounded, as it struggled to secure the strait. There would be a need for a significant commitment of ground forces to guarantee safe passage for all shipping, civilian and military alike. The longer ground forces could operate on Iranian soil, the better the chances Iranian missiles would not be able to effectively interdict shipping. Conversely, the longer ground forces operated on Iranian soil, the greater likelihood there would be of decisive ground engagement. With U.S. air power expected to be fully committed to the missile interdiction mission, any large-scale ground engagement would create a situation in which air power would have to be redirected into tactical support, and away from missile interdiction, creating a window of vulnerability which the Iranians would very likely exploit.

Iran has promised to strike targets in Israel as well, especially if Israel is a participant in any military action. Such Israeli involvement is highly unlikely, since to do so in any meaningful fashion Israel would need to fly in Iraqi air space, a violation of sovereignty the Iraqi government will never tolerate. The anti-American backlash that would be generated in Iraq would be immediate and severe. In short, virtually every operation involving the training of Iraqi

forces would be terminated as the U.S. military trainers would need to be withdrawn to the safety of the fortified U.S. bases to protect them from attack. U.S. civilian contractors would likewise need to be either withdrawn completely from Iraq or restricted to the fortified bases. All gains alleged to have been made in the “surge” would be wiped away instantly. Worse, the Iraqi countryside would become a seething mass of anti-American activity, which would require a huge effort to reverse, if it ever could be. Iraq as we now know it would be lost, and what would emerge in its stead would not only be unsympathetic to the United States but actually a breeding ground for anti-American action that could very well expand beyond the boundaries of Iraq and the Middle East.

The chances of preventing an Iranian-Israeli clash in the event of a U.S. strike against Iran are slim to none. Even if Iran initially showed restraint, Hezbollah would undoubtedly join the fray, prompting an Israeli counterstrike in Lebanon and Iran which would in turn bring long-range Iranian missiles raining down on Israeli cities.

Neither the Israeli nor the American (and for that reason, European and Asian) economy would emerge intact from a U.S. attack on Iran. Oil would almost instantly break the \$300-per-barrel mark, and because the resulting conflict would more than likely be longer and more violent than most are predicting, there is a good chance oil would top \$500 or even more within days or weeks. Hyperinflation would almost certainly strike every market-based economy, and the markets themselves would collapse under the strain.

The good news is that the military planners in the Pentagon are cognizant of this reality. They know the limitations of American power, and what they can and cannot achieve. When it was uncertain how Iran would respond to a limited attack, either on their nuclear facilities or bases associated with the Revolutionary Guard Command, some planners might have thought that the U.S. could actually pull off a quick and relatively bloodless attack. Now that Iran has made it crystal clear that even a limited U.S. attack would bring about a massive Iranian response, all military planners now understand that any U.S. military attack will have to be massive. Simply put, the United States does not now have the military capacity in the Middle East to launch such a strike, and any redeployment of U.S. forces into the region could not go undetected, either by Iran, which would in turn redeploy its forces, or the rest of the world. Because a U.S. attack against Iran would have such horrific detrimental impact on the entire world, it is hard to imagine the international community remaining mute as American military might is assembled.

Likewise, despite the disposition of Congress to either remain silent on the issue or actively facilitate military action against Iran, it would become increasingly difficult for American lawmakers to ignore the consequences of a military strike on Iran, economically and politically. The same can be said of both major presidential candidates. The decision by Iran to show its hand on how it would respond to any American aggression has cleared the air, so to speak, about what is actually being discussed when one speaks of military action against Iran. In many ways, the Iranian missile tests have made it less likely that there will be a war with Iran, simply because the stakes of any such action are so plainly obvious to all parties involved.

Iran continues, based upon all available intelligence information, to pursue a nuclear program which is exclusively intended for peaceful energy purposes. Any concerns which may exist about the dual-use potential of Iran's uranium enrichment programs can be mitigated through viable nuclear inspections conducted by the International Atomic Energy Agency. IAEA inspections should be improved upon by getting Iran to go along with an additional inspection protocol, rather than pursuing military action which will destroy the inspection process and remove the very verification processes which provide the international community with the confidence that Iran is not pursuing a nuclear weapons program.

The reality is that Iran's nuclear program is here to stay. Iran has every right under international law to pursue this program, and regional and global tensions would be greatly reduced (along with the price of oil) if American policies, and in related fashion U.N. Security Council mandates, were adjusted accordingly. Israeli paranoia—derived not so much from any genuine Iranian threat but rather an affront to Israeli nuclear hegemony in the Middle East—must in turn be subdued. This can be done through a mixture of international pressure designed to punish Israel diplomatically and economically for any failure to adhere to international norms when it comes to peaceful coexistence with its neighbors, and international assurances that Israel's sovereignty and viability as a nation-state will forever be respected and defended.

Of course, there can be no meaningful international pressure brought to bear on Israel without American participation, and herein lies the crux of the problem. Until the U.S. Congress segregates legitimate national security concerns from narrow Israeli-only issues, the pro-Israel lobby will have considerable control over American national security policy. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee's continued push for congressional action concerning the implementation of what is tantamount to a naval blockade of Iran (and as such, an act of war) by pushing House Resolution 362 and Senate Resolution 580 is mind-boggling given the reality of the situation. Congress must stop talking blockade, and start discussing stability and confidence-building measures.

There has never been a more pressing time than now for Congress to conduct serious hearings on U.S. policy toward Iran. Such hearings must not replicate the rubber-stamp hearings held by the U.S. Senate and House in the summer of 2002. Those hearings were simply a facilitating vehicle for war with Iraq. New hearings must expand the body of witnesses beyond administration officials and those who would mirror their policy positions, and include experts and specialists who could articulate a counter point of view, exposing Congress to information and analysis that might

prompt a fuller debate. This is the last thing AIPAC and the Bush administration want to see. But it is the one thing the American people should be demanding.

Only an irrational person or organization could continue to discuss as viable a military strike against Iran. Sadly, based upon past and current policy articulations, neither AIPAC nor the Bush administration can be considered rational when it comes to the issue of Iran. It is up to the American people, through their elected representatives in Congress, to inject a modicum of sanity into a situation that continues to be in danger of spinning out of control.

Scott Ritter was a U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq from 1991 to 1998. He is the author of "Target Iran" (Nation Books, 2007).



AP photo / Hasan Sarbakhshian

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, far left, sits with officers during a military parade last year.

A Progressive Journal of News and Opinion. Editor, Robert Scheer. Publisher, Zuade Kaufman.
Copyright © 2008 Truthdig, L.L.C. All rights reserved.

Web site development by Hop Studios | Hosted by NEXCESS.NET